

# THE PRESIDENTS OF MOUNT RUSHMORE

A One Act Play  
By Gloria L. Emmerich

## CAST:

### MALE:

CODY (student or young adult)

BRYAN (student or young adult)

GEORGE WASHINGTON

THOMAS JEFFERSON

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THEODORE "TEDDY" ROOSEVELT

### FEMALE:

TAYLOR (student or young adult)

JESSIE (student or young adult)

MARTHA JEFFERSON (Thomas' wife)

EDITH ROOSEVELT (Teddy's wife)

**PLACE:** *Mount Rushmore National Memorial Park in Keystone, SD*

**TIME:** *Modern day*

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**ACT I Sc 1:**

*High school students BRYAN, CODY, TAYLOR, and JESSIE have been studying the four presidents of Mount Rushmore in their history class. They decided to take a trip to Keystone, SD to visit the national memorial and see up close the faces of the four most influential presidents in American history. Trying their best to follow the map's directions, they end up lost...somewhere near the face of Mount Rushmore. All four of them are losing their patience.*

**BRYAN:** We passed this same rock a half hour ago!  
**TAYLOR:** *(Groans.)* Remind me again whose idea it was to come here...?  
**CODY:** Be quiet, Taylor! You know very well that we *ALL* agreed to come here this summer. We wanted to learn more about the presidents of Mt. Rushmore.  
**BRYAN:** Couldn't we just Google it...?  
**JESSIE:** Knock it off, Bryan. Cody's right. We all wanted to come here. Reading about a place like this isn't the same as actually going there.  
**TAYLOR:** If we ever *find* it!  
**JESSIE:** Come on, Cody. Just face it. We're lost!  
**BRYAN:** *Again!*  
**CODY:** You guys try following this! *(Waves the map in their faces.)* According to the map, we should be there!  
**TAYLOR:** Well, as far as I can tell, we're somewhere behind Mt. Rushmore...  
**BRYAN:** Let me see that! *(Grabs the map from CODY and stares at it, then looks around.)* You idiot! Taylor's right. Look! *(They all turn and see the backside of Mt. Rushmore. Each president stands in a silly pose.)*  
**TAYLOR:** Yep...that's definitely the *backside* of Mount Rushmore!  
**BRYAN:** That's something you don't see every day...  
**JESSIE:** Let's follow the pathway around to the front. Come on! *(As they begin to walk around to the front, "Mt. Rushmore" turns with them so that they appear to be walking around to the front of it.)*  
**CODY:** *(Pleased with himself.)* I *TOLD* you we were there!  
**BRYAN:** Shuddup! *(Whacks CODY with the map.)*  
**TAYLOR:** Dork! *(Gives CODY a shove.)*  
**JESSIE:** Idiot!  
**CODY:** Hmmf! Ungrateful! *(Starts rummaging through his backpack.)* Now, where is that book...here it is! All right; so do you want to know about this place or not?!

**JESSIE:** No, we just came all the way out here to get a tan!  
**BRYAN:** Cut him a break, Jess. Yes, Cody...read on.  
**CODY:** Thank you. *(He clears his throat and takes his time as he prepares to speak, then notices the others impatiently glaring at him.)* Okay, okay! "The Mount Rushmore National Memorial is a sculpture carved into the granite face of Mount Rushmore near Keystone, South Dakota, in the United States."  
**TAYLOR:** Good grief, Cody! I think we *KNOW* where we are *now*! Tell us something about this place we *don't* know!  
**CODY:** I'm getting there...I'm getting there! Let's see....oh! Here we go. "Sculpted by Danish-American Gutzon Borglum and his son, Lincoln Borglum," sheesh; great names; "Mount Rushmore features 60-foot sculptures of the heads of

four United States presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. The entire memorial covers 1,278.45 acres and is 5,725 feet above sea level.”

- JESSIE:** Okay...so *now* you're giving us information we *don't want* to know!
- CODY:** What did you expect? An action packed novel about aliens and hobbits!?
- BRYAN:** *(Takes the book from CODY.)* Relax, Cody. Let me see what else it says. Here. It looks like some historian got the idea to carve famous people into the rock to help promote tourism in South Dakota.
- TAYLOR:** Clearly, there was nothing else out here to attract people...
- BRYAN:** And at first, they wanted to feature western heroes like Buffalo Bill, or Chief Red Cloud, or Lewis and Clark.
- JESSIE:** Typical. No females! What about Annie Oakley or Calamity Jane?!
- TAYLOR:** Yeah! And what about Madonna, or Barbra Streisand, or little Red Riding Hood!? Huh?! Huh?! What about them?!
- CODY:** *(Stares at her in disbelief.)* Are you insane?!
- TAYLOR:** *(Brief pause.)* Sometimes...
- BRYAN:** May I continue...*please*?!
- JESSIE:** I was serious, Bryan. What about Calamity Jane?
- BRYAN:** What about her, Jess!? *(They all look at her.)* Hmm...?
- JESSIE:** Well...she was...she was...
- CODY:** She was a *calamity*, Jess! Hello! Now let Bryan continue!
- JESSIE:** *(Turns to TAYLOR and speaks under her breath.)* Jerk.
- TAYLOR:** *(Agreeing.)* Dork.
- JESSIE:** Nerd.
- TAYLOR:** Geek.
- JESSIE:** Freak.
- TAYLOR:** Moron.
- CODY:** *(Screams, making them all jump.)* Enough!! Bryan...go on...*please*!
- BRYAN:** *(Looking through the book.)* It doesn't say too much else, Cody. Just that the four presidents' faces represented the first 130 years of the history of the United States.
- TAYLOR:** So, did any of them get to see it when it was finished?
- CODY:** Hardly, Taylor. They were long dead before this was finished.
- BRYAN:** He's right. They didn't finish it until 1941 and that was because they ran out of money. *(Looks back at the Mount.)* They were supposed to be from the waist up...but not enough funding came through for that.
- JESSIE:** *(Giggles.)* Well...it's a good thing they started from the top down and not from the waist up or we'd be looking at four belly buttons! *(They all laugh.)*
- TAYLOR:** And it's an even better thing that they hid the backside! *(The girls giggle.)*
- BRYAN:** Let's get closer. *(They all move up closer to Mount Rushmore. Suddenly, Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt turns and speaks to Lincoln.)*
- TEDDY:** *(To Abraham Lincoln.)* Either my glasses are horribly dirty or I do believe there are four young folk standing down there staring at us. *(All four kids stand frozen, staring with dropped jaws at the four presidents. Finally, they all scream and run off to the side, staring back at the presidents.)*
- ABE:** Well...to be perfectly honest; there *are* four people staring at us.
- GEORGE:** I cannot tell a lie...Abe's right.

**THOMAS:** *(Speaks with a southern drawl.)* Gawking at us as if we were something out of the Wild West!

**TEDDY:** I believe we *are* out west, my good boy! *(Laughs.)*

**TAYLOR:** Cody...remember when you asked me if I was insane and I said, "Sometimes...?"

**CODY:** Yeah...

**TAYLOR:** Well...I think this is one of those times...

**JESSIE:** Must be contagious 'cause I think I am too!

**TEDDY:** What do you say we get down from here, ol' boys, and ask those four young people what they're staring at? Who's game?

**GEORGE:** I would like to be the *first* to join you, Teddy.

**THOMAS:** Lead the way.

**ABE:** Honestly, I've been itching to do this for years!

**TEDDY:** Speaking of itching...I've had an awful itch I've been aching to scratch forever so long! *(Stands tall and stretches then reaches down and scratches the back of his leg.) Ahhhhh!* That's much better! *(The other men follow suit, standing, stretching in one way or another, coming out from behind the Mount and approach the four kids.)*

**THOMAS:** You four young people seem to be quite taken with us.

**GEORGE:** Come now, Thomas; that *is* why we are up there, after all.

**ABE:** That's the truth. I do believe we *want* people to stare at us, right, Teddy?

**TEDDY:** Absolutely! *(Getting into BRYAN'S face.)* And who might you be, lad?

**BRYAN:** Uh...well, I'm Bryan. And, and this is Cody, Taylor, and Jess....er, Jessie.

**CODY:** Hello...

**JESSIE:** It's a...uh...pleasure to meet you; all of you.

**TAYLOR:** *(Still staring.)* Wow...

**THOMAS:** Wow...? *(Looks at GEORGE.)* I don't recognize that language, George; do you?

**GEORGE:** *(Shaking his head.)* Hmm, must be a tribe we never encountered, Thomas.

**CODY:** *(Pushing TAYLOR aside.)* Don't mind her. She's a halfwit.

**JESSIE:** *(Slugs CODY and laughs.)* Ha, ha! He's just kidding. Always trying to be funny... *(Glares at CODY.)* ...and never succeeding! I think Taylor's just a little shocked at meeting four presidents all at once, right Taylor?

**TAYLOR:** Wow...

**BRYAN:** She'll snap out of it eventually...maybe.

**ABE:** Poor child...but, in the meantime, we were wondering why you were all just staring at us so intently. Surely we don't look that strange, do we?

**TEDDY:** Come now, Mr. Lincoln! All they could see were four faces staring back at them from a rock on the hill! *(Laughs.)* I do believe I'd be gawking at us too if I were in their place!

**JESSIE:** We've been studying the four presidents of Mount Rushmore in school and Cody thought it would be great fun to come out here and actually see you face to face.

**TEDDY:** Bully! A splendid idea, if I do say so myself!

**ABE:** To be honest, I've been looking at these three face to face for years and it isn't all that splendid! And, only half my face gets the sunlight every day!

**TEDDY:** Well, my good man, you get more sunlight than I do since your *grand* profile blocks it from reaching most of mine!

**THOMAS:** Really, Teddy? Any time the sun *does* shine on your face you complain that it glares horribly on your spectacles! Isn't that true, George?

**GEORGE:** I wouldn't know, Thomas. I can't see a single one of you since I've got my back to you. (*Leans over to JESSIE.*) And, that gives me the best spot on the mountain for sure! (*He and the kids laugh.*)

**CODY:** Maybe you face that way because you were the first president...and you're sort of leading the way, as a forefather of our country.

**GEORGE:** Why, young Cody...you appear to be quite intelligent, although you don't look it. (*Referring to the odd hat that CODY is wearing.*)

**CODY:** (*Unclear if that was a compliment or not.*) Thanks...I think.

**GEORGE:** So, what other great things do you know about me...er, us.

**BRYAN:** Well...that's just it. Now that we're here and...*you're* here...maybe *you* can tell *us* a few things.

**THOMAS:** Yes, George...tell them. It's always more meaningful coming straight from the horse's mouth. (*The three Presidents chuckle until GEORGE glares at them.*)

**ABE:** (*Clears his throat.*) All right, Teddy, Thomas. We've jested long enough. We don't want these fine young people to think history was a joke now, do we? Let's make sure they know the most important things about us and the founding of this fine country.

**TEDDY:** Here, here! Spoken like a true president of these United States. I agree with ol' Abe.

**TAYLOR:** Because we sure don't want you to think we've taken you for granite all these years. (*Laughs.*) Get it? Granted...granite...take you for granite? The mount is made of granite...? (*Laughs again but no one joins her. She slowly stops laughing.*) Well, *I* thought it was funny!

**CODY:** You would...

**TEDDY:** Bully! The halfwit speaks! All's well! All right George; you first, since you actually *were* first. Give it your best shot, ol' boy!

**THOMAS:** Now, Teddy; don't you think it rather pompous to toot one's own horn? Let me do the honors, George. And if I leave anything out of great importance you can correct me.

**TEDDY:** Smashing idea, Thomas! Now why didn't *I* think of that!

**THOMAS:** (*Matter-of-factly.*) Because *I* did...

**GEORGE:** Thank you kindly, Mr. Jefferson.

**THOMAS:** George Washington is called "the father of his country" because of the huge role he played in creating and leading the United States of America and for his contribution as a soldier who fought for this country. Before he was ever president he commanded the Colonial forces in the American Revolutionary War. It was under his leadership of the Continental Army that we were victorious over the British at Valley Forge that frigid winter of 1778. Truly a great military leader and war hero.

**TEDDY:** And, he was tremendously popular even after the war!

**ABE:** Honestly, it was only natural that George would be chosen as our first president of these United States in 1789, once our constitution was ratified...that is to say, approved.

**THOMAS:** Mr. Washington served as president for two terms and was asked to serve a third...

**GEORGE:** But, I refused. I longed for my Virginia farm at Mt. Vernon.

**THOMAS:** Yet, not a year after your second term ended you went back into the army to be our Commander in Chief.

**GEORGE:** But alas, that only lasted for 18 months.

**TEDDY:** Pretty much died in the saddle, didn't you, George?! Bully for you!

**JESSIE:** Mr. President...?

**G/T/A/T:** *(All four presidents turn and reply in unison.)* Yes?

**JESSIE:** Oh...uh, sorry. I guess I should clarify *which* president. *(Embarrassed, she giggles.)* It's not every day you get to meet so many at one time, you know!

**TEDDY:** And four of the very best ones, to be sure! *(Loud laugh.)*

**JESSIE:** Absolutely! So, let me try this again. President Washington, I was wondering about some of the facts we've read about you. *Now* they say that some of that information is false.

**ABE:** *(Alarmed.)* They taught you lies about one of our finest presidents??!!

**TEDDY:** *(Aside to THOMAS.)* Seems to be obsessed with this honesty thing, doesn't he?

**THOMAS:** *(Shaking his head.)* Simply *abhors* lying, I believe.

**GEORGE:** Well, tell me what facts you speak of and I'll set you straight, my dear.

**JESSIE:** The thing about the cherry tree...they told us when you were little that your father asked you who had chopped down one of his cherry trees and you said, "I cannot tell a lie, father. I chopped it down myself." That was told to let us know that you were a man of your word and that you didn't tell lies...?

**TEDDY:** Sounds more like a story for Honest Abe if you ask me! What do you say, George?

**GEORGE:** *(To JESSIE.)* That, my dear, is clearly a myth. I may have chopped wood for my father back in the day, but I did not chop down a cherry tree that I recall.

**TEDDY:** I wonder what stories they made up about you, Thomas! Perhaps you knocked someone out with your violin! *(Laughs until THOMAS crosses his arms and glares at him.)* Or...perhaps not...

**BRYAN:** I've got one! Your teeth! They told us you had *wooden* teeth. Is that true?

**TEDDY:** Great Scott, young man! Imagine the condition of one's lips after every meal! Splinters everywhere!

**GEORGE:** Teddy's right. My false teeth are made from many things...but wood is *not* one of them.

**ABE:** Many things...? What *kind* of things?

**GEORGE:** Oh...er, well...I don't think anyone really cares to hear about...

**OTHERS:** *(Speaking at the same time.)* Of course! Sure. Yes we do! Tell us!

**GEORGE:** *(Slightly jumps at their eager response, and then relents.)* Oh, all right then...well, my false teeth have a metal base that holds them into place with a spring...so I can open and close my jaw.

**TAYLOR:** Sort of like a puppet! *(All turn and stare at her then turn back to GEORGE.)*

**CODY:** And the teeth...?

**GEORGE:** *(Hesitating.)* Um...my teeth are actually made from other *human* teeth.

**TEDDY:** *And...?*

**GEORGE:** And some were made from ivory...

**BRYAN:** Elephants?!

**TAYLOR:** *Duh,* Bryan! That *IS* where ivory comes from!

**BRYAN:** It could have been a wild boar!

**GEORGE:** No...she's right...they used elephant tusks...

**JESSIE:** *(Curious.)* And...something else?

**GEORGE:** *(Tries to cover his answer with a cough, and then changes the subject.)* Cows teeth. Now perhaps you'd like to hear about my...

**OTHERS:** *(Flabbergasted.)* COWS TEETH??!! *(They laugh.)*

**TAYLOR:** A real cow?

**BRYAN:** What? Versus a *fake* cow? Of course a *real* cow, you dork!

**TEDDY:** Well, I imagine that would put you in a bad "moo-ed." *(Takes everyone a second then they all burst out laughing.)*

**CODY:** Wouldn't that make you a cannibal if you ate beef with those teeth! *(They all laugh again.)*

**TEDDY:** And with both elephant ivory and cow's teeth he'd be chewing the cud from dawn till "tusk!" *(Laughter.)*

**GEORGE:** *(Only slightly perturbed, since he knew this would happen, he raises his eyebrow and gives TEDDY a look.)* Are you quite through, Mr. Roosevelt...?

**TEDDY:** *(Winding down his laughing.)* Whew....sorry, old boy. I suppose you'll *never* forget I said that! *(Laughs again.)* Sorry...couldn't resist. Yes, yes; I'm quite through now.

**GEORGE:** Thank you. *(Clears his throat and turns back to the four kids.)* Any other questions or myths you'd like me to clear up about myself?

**TEDDY:** Oh please, no! I don't think I could take any more, George!

**ABE:** Perhaps it's time to move along to the next president. Mr. Jefferson, may I have the pleasure of introducing you to these young people?

**THOMAS:** I'd be honored, Mr. Lincoln.

**TAYLOR:** We *do* know that Mr. Jefferson was our third president.

**ABE:** That's right. You might be interested to know that George and Thomas were alike in several ways. They were both redheads...

**TEDDY:** *(Aside.)* Which means they were both hotheads!

**ABE:** They were both farmers: George had Mount Vernon, and Thomas had Monticello. They both married rich widows...

**TEDDY:** Now *that* was a very smart move...and they had the same name! Martha!

**ABE:** And of course, they were both president of this fair country.

**JESSIE:** You both had a wife named Martha? Now *that* is freaky!

**TAYLOR:** And both were widows. Did you two know each other?

**GEORGE:** *(He and THOMAS exchange looks.)* I should hope so...since Thomas was Secretary of State my first term as president.

**ABE:** Then he became the leader of the Democratic-Republican Party and was the Vice President for President John Adams, the second president of the United States.

**BRYAN:** Yes, but that was all after 1776. After “The Declaration of Independence.”

**THOMAS:** Very good, Mister Bryan.

**ABE:** Yes. Thomas Jefferson was the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence. He also signed the document. That single document stated that the thirteen colonies were now individual sovereign states that made up the United States of America. We were no longer under British rule. We were a free nation. And, as you will hear later, I made this the centerpiece of my Gettysburg Address.

**JESSIE:** So...how did it feel...to write such a document as that?

**BRYAN:** You mean after congress tore it to shreds?

**JESSIE:** What do you mean?

**BRYAN:** Come on, Jessie; don't you know your history? Congress made him cut out all kinds of stuff. We only know about the final draft but the original one with all of Jefferson's cuts and Benjamin Franklin and John Adams' edits is at the Library of Congress.

**JESSIE:** Gee...sorry, President Jefferson. That must have been rough to sit there and listen to them.

**TAYLOR:** Sort of like getting graded on a report in front of the whole class. Terrible.

**ABE:** Even with all those cuts and all the changes made it is still one of the greatest documents penned in the history of our nation.

**THOMAS:** Thank you, Abe.

**CODY:** That's right! (*Opening his book.*) It says here, that the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence is “one of the best known sentences in the English language,” containing “the most potent and consequential words in American history.”

**THOMAS:** “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

**ABE:** And yes, Bryan; that was *before* he was president of the United States. During his first term as president he signed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

**TAYLOR:** OMG!! I'M from Louisiana! That's my home state! Whoohoo!

**CODY:** (*Apologetically.*) I told you she was insane.

**BRYAN:** Gee, just think, Taylor; if it wasn't for Thomas Jefferson you'd have to say you were from a swamp hole somewhere west of Mississippi.

**TAYLOR:** Ha, ha! Very funny.

**JESSIE:** Okay, time for myth busting. I think I read somewhere that you played the violin. Is that true?

**THOMAS:** And the cello. My wife, Martha, used to accompany me on the piano.

**TEDDY:** I heard that it was your shared love of music that made Martha fall in love with you, Thomas. (*Aside.*) Clearly it wasn't his looks or his redheaded temper! Ha!

**GEORGE:** Ahhh! And here comes your Martha now, Thomas! And she brings your violin! Perhaps you could play us a tune while we dance.

**TEDDY:** Yes! That would be splendid! Me first!

**MARTHA:** (*Hands THOMAS his violin and gives him a peck on the cheek and squeezes his arm.*) Hello my dear. You're looking handsome as ever!



**TEDDY:** *(Aside.)* The eyes go first, I'm afraid. Play us a tune, Thomas; and let us all have a dance with your beautiful wife before we move on to Honest Abe! Come on; be a sport!

**DANCE**  
*(THOMAS on the violin)*

*MARTHA proceeds to dance, first with TEDDY then GEORGE cuts in, then she approaches ABE as she is handed off to him by GEORGE because Mr. Lincoln feels rather awkward on a dance floor. But, MARTHA soon makes him forget*

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